An illustration of a woman with dark, curly hair, wearing a brown sweater and dark pants, standing in a field of green grass and flowers. She is holding a stack of three books. The top book is blue with the word 'FAMILY' in white, the middle book is orange with a white spine, and the bottom book is blue with the word 'PHOTOS' in white. The background is a bright blue sky with several small hearts in red, orange, and pink. The title '11 Words for Love' is written in white, with '11' in a simple font, 'Words' in a cursive font, 'for' in a simple font, and 'Love' in a large, flowing cursive font with a yellow underline.

11 Words for Love

Randa Abdel-Fattah

Maxine Beneba Clarke

TEACHERS RESOURCES

11 Words for Love

Randa Abdel-Fattah 

Maxine Beneba Clarke 

Teachers Resources by Robyn Sheahan-Bright

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INTRODUCTION

11 Words for Love is a moving and joyful book for children from all backgrounds about the many ways we love, from its award-winning author Randa Abdel-Fattah and the acclaimed illustrator of this book, Maxine Beneba Clarke.

There are eleven words for love, and my family knows them all.

A family flees their homeland to find safety in another country, carrying little more than a suitcase full of love.

As their journey unfolds, the oldest child narrates 11 meanings for love in Arabic as her family show, and are shown, all different kinds of love in their new home, and they also remember the love they have for their homeland and for those left behind or lost along the way.

In the Arabic language, there are over 50 words describing the degrees of love. That's 50 stories, 50 life-worlds. This lyrical and heartwarming book takes you on a journey through 11 of these Arabic expressions for love.

THEMES & CURRICULUM TOPICS

Several themes are covered in this book which might be related to the Australian Curriculum, including:

HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES (HASS)

Several themes and topics are relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/humanities-and-social-sciences/hass/>

LOVE

Discussion Point: Discuss the different forms of love, such as the love of parents for their children, and children for their parents; the love of grandparents for their grandchildren, and grandchildren for their grandparents; the love of siblings for each other; the love of friends for each other; the love of our memories; the love of kindness shown to us; the love of beauty in nature; the love of learning and reading; the love of art; the love of pets; the love of places. What other forms of love are there? Which of these forms of love did you observe in this picture book?

Discussion Point: How do you express love – in words, in actions, in images or in what other ways?

Discussion Point: There are said to be 50 words describing the degrees of love in Arabic. How many English language words for love do your students know? Make a class list. How many words for love in other languages do you know? Make another list. [See also **Author's Notes** below.]

REFUGEES & IMMIGRANTS

Discussion Point: This story is about a Palestinian family which has left their home to establish themselves in a new country with only a suitcase of memories. Discuss the issue of how immigrants and refugees are treated when they arrive in any new country. [See also **Creative Arts** below.]

Activity: Compare this book to other picture books about refugees and immigrants. [See **Bibliography**.]

MEMORIES

Discussion Point: The suitcase in this story is obviously precious as it contains everything this family has brought with them from home, including photos. How important are memories in maintaining contact with our past?

Discussion Point: Later in the book the child is seen taking Polaroid photos. From then, the photos look new and there is no tape on the edges used to stick them in photo albums. These newer photos denote the making of new memories.

Discussion Point: How do you preserve your own family's memories? Apart from photos, stories are a powerful way to preserve memories. Encourage members of the class to write down memories which are significant to them.

COMMUNITY

Discussion Point: This novel shows the refugee family gradually becoming part of a new community, having left the one they knew behind. What makes a community?

Discussion Point: The scenes in this book reveal the kindness of neighbours in the community depicted. For example, the second frame has a girl presenting the narrator with flowers and an attached note which reads 'Welcome to our school.' A school is one form of community. Another frame depicts neighbours speaking over their fences as they go about their daily household chores. A neighbourhood is another form of community. Identify the various 'communities' depicted in this book.

Discussion Point: Australia has witnessed the kindness of neighbours in the recent campaign to have Kokilapathmapriya (Priya) and Nadesalingam Murugappan (Nades) and their two daughters returned to their adopted home of Biloela in Queensland. Have there been any similar examples that your students are aware of where community members have helped or advocated for each other?

ISLAMIC, MUSLIM, PALESTINIAN CULTURE & BELIEFS

Discussion Point: The words for love are translated in Arabic in this book. In one frame, elderly members of their family at home are emerging from the Dome of the Rock, one of Islam's most revered landmarks located in Islam's third holiest site, the Al-Aqsa compound in the old city of Jerusalem. What other details about Islamic beliefs and Muslim culture did you observe in this book? What do you know about these complex beliefs and cultures? Research and discuss further. [See **Bibliography**.] [See **Illustrator's Notes** below.]

Discussion Point: In some frames women are depicted wearing the hijab, one of the forms of headwear adopted by Muslim women. Read more about the various forms of headwear and

what they denote.

Discussion Point: In another frame the family is dancing the traditional Palestinian dance, the *dabka*. What part does dance play in Palestinian culture?

DIVERSITY

Discussion Point: The school children depicted in this book are culturally diverse. Discuss with students the diversity of their community.

Discussion Point: What are the advantages of living in a diverse community?

ENGLISH LANGUAGE AND LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/english/>>

The text of this book might be studied in relation to the following aspects:

Activity: The text contains **rhyme**, for example, meet/feet; kind/entwined. Choose further pairs of rhymed words in this text. Then choose a third rhyming word and create another rhymed sentence which relates to this text. [See **Worksheet 2.**]

Discussion Point: The text also contains a **repeated refrain**: 'There are 11 words for love, and my family knows them all.' What does such repetition cement in the reader's mind?

Discussion Point: What other examples of literary devices did you observe in this novel? For example, *Alliteration and assonance*: 'grows and glows'.

Activity: Test your students' **comprehension** by asking them questions about the written and visual text. [See also **Author's Notes** below.]

Activity: Write a story about another child arriving in a new place and how they might confront the process of fitting in to a new society and community.

Activity: Write a poem in any style reflecting on immigration. [See **Bibliography.**]

VISUAL LITERACY

This is relevant to the following Curriculum Area:

<<https://www.australiancurriculum.edu.au/f-10-curriculum/the-arts/visual-arts/>>

The visual text of a book combines with the written text to tell the story using the various parts of the book's design and illustrations, as explored below:

Activity: The **(front and back) cover** of a book is an important part of its message. The suitcase on the back is a symbol denoting not only the journey to a new country, but also a repository of precious things and by implication, of memories. On the front the mother is carrying some of the contents from suitcase – photo albums. Flowers and hearts decorate the image. Design your own cover for this book.

Activity: The **endpapers** contain a) an image of the father carrying the suitcase, and b) the

suitcase floating aloft with hearts on strings supporting it. Design a different set of endpapers which might relate to this picture book text.

Discussion Point: The **title page** depicts a little girl with her back to the viewer holding a suitcase and waving through a window as a plane flies away. What feelings does this image evoke?

Discussion Point: The **format** of the book is portrait. How does the **layout of the storyboard** and the **format and design** of the book influence your reading of it?

Activity: Creating characters entails studying **facial expressions and body language**. What do the drawings in this book tell the reader about each character?

Activity: The **medium or style** employed is watercolour pencil and collage detailing, on heavily textured coloured cardstock. Maxine describes herself as a 'multi-disciplinary' writer since she is a poet, picture book writer, and memoirist. 'I always drew but never really thought of myself as an illustrator and artist.' ('Author Maxine Beneba Clarke on the lack of racial diversity in children's books | Art Works' *YouTube* September 5, 2021 <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0dA2MDanoTQ>>.)

The **colours** used in this book are rich primary colours slightly muted in an evocative way. Examine Maxine Beneba Clarke's medium and style and invite students to emulate it in a work of art reflecting on the experiences described in the book. [See **Illustrator's Notes** below.]

Discussion Point: Prediction is an important part of picture book reading. The reader's perspective in observing strong left to right movement across a double-page spread is also important in a picture book, encouraging the reader to follow the action sequentially in a filmic way. Invite students to read and predict what might come next on a subsequent page in this text.

Discussion Point: Symbolism and sub-text is used in the inclusion of hearts (representative of love), sunflowers (which are representative of the sun and of happiness) and the suitcase (representative of memories, as mentioned above), and rainbow colours (representative of diversity) in the visual text. Encourage students to examine these symbolic references and to describe what they mean to them. [See also **Illustrator's Notes** below.]

Activity: Many of the illustrations demonstrate the use of unfilled space defining the images of people and objects. Encourage students to experiment with drawing in this way.

Activity: Invite students to draw, paint, or collage another scene to accompany the story they wrote above. Create a classroom mural using all the images. [See also **Worksheet 1** below.]

Activity: Create a graphic novel/comic version of a scene in this book. [See **Bibliography**.] [See also **Worksheet 3**.]

CREATIVE ARTS

There are many creative activities suggested by this text:

1. Create a Booklet tracing your family history and the migrations that any of the members of your family have undertaken in recent times or past history. Read works such as *My Place* by Nadia Wheatley and illustrated by Donna Rawlins (1987, 2008) and *Waves* by Donna Rawlins and illustrated by Heather Potter and Mark Jackson (2018) to prepare for this exercise.

2. Collect photographs of people who are immigrating. See for example, 'Immigration' *Unsplash* <<https://unsplash.com/s/photos/immigration>> or 'Migrants Australia' *Alamy* <<https://www.alamy.com/stock-photo/migrants-australia.html>>. Invite students to examine the photos and to respond to what they see in words or images.

3. Create a poster advocating for people who come to Australia as immigrants and refugees and how we might welcome them.

4. Create a blurb promoting this book. How would you describe it?

5. Create a Book Trailer to promote this book. [See **Bibliography**.]

LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

Activity: Research the topics above online.

Activity: Research the author and illustrator online. [See **Bibliography**.]

FURTHER TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION AND RESEARCH

- Research the work of Randa Abdel-Fattah. Compare this to her other books.
- Research the work of Maxine Beneba Clarke. Compare this to her other books.
- Students might research this book in comparison to reading other picture books such as those listed in the **Bibliography**.
- Investigate any other topic not covered in these notes which you consider is suggested by this text.

CONCLUSION

This book is a tribute to the power of love and to the healing it can engender. Being new to a country can be a very disorienting, confusing and even alienating time for many people. This book celebrates the joy to be found in opening our hearts to other people, and in being welcoming and considerate of others. It encourages children to empathise and to cherish the opportunity to engage with new people and to include them in the ever-widening circle of those they consider to be their loved ones.

AUTHOR'S NOTES

When I was about 22 years old I was in my grandmother's villa in Egypt reading the English translation to the songs of Egyptian singer icon Umm Kulthum. I'd bought the book at a book fair in Cairo because I was obsessively listening to her songs and hearing them everywhere: from taxis, cafes, shops, my grandmother's radio. I was captivated by the romance and richness of the Arabic language in the songs, and especially the range and intensity of words to describe love. The seed of the idea for this book was planted then. I wrote some notes in the book and then lost the confidence to pursue the idea when I returned to Australia. I had doubts that anybody would be interested in a book led by the Arabic language.

But my confidence and honouring of my heritage over the years ensured that the seed didn't

die but kept growing. After all, we are a country of hundreds of languages – First Nations', settlers and settler migrants. That's hundreds of ways of connecting to identity, place, and each other. The thing is, language isn't just words spoken. Language is a life-world, a way of experiencing, interpreting, communicating with and in the world. So, here's a fun fact: there are over 50 words in the Arabic language describing the stages of love. That's 50 stories, 50 life-worlds. I chose 11 words which offer readers the chance to experience the universal – tenderness, family, loyalty, friendship – through to the particular – the life-world of a Palestinian family in exile.

Over many years the seed finally grew inside my imagination into the book you are reading today. A book for children from all backgrounds, about the love we have for each other, the things that keep us apart, and those which bring us together.

Working with the wonderful and brilliant Maxine Beneba Clarke was a joy. What made my collaboration with Maxine so special was how we brought our own unique experiences, heritage and life-worlds together. We found common ground to share between us in the telling and illustrating of this story. When we started, we spoke about our ideas, inspiration, and commitments. I trusted Maxine completely. I knew her illustrations would be a story in themselves and that she would honour my words. When I handed the text over to Maxine, I was so excited to see how she would interpret the words. We would email and text each other and get excited about the smallest details because we were creating layers of story-telling. Every word in the text is deliberate. Every illustration has layers of meaning to it. It really has been a labour of love!

ILLUSTRATOR'S NOTES

The exciting challenge of creating the images for *11 Words for Love* was to come up with an 'illustration narrative' that complimented Randa's beautiful text exploring 11 of the meanings for love in Arabic in a way that was vibrant and engaging, whilst still allowing the full beauty of the words to guide the reader's journey. Creating the illustrations was a collaborative process, in which I created a set of initial 'idea' images and the author and I worked from there, discussing which images we thought worked and why, at various stages of the process over 12 months or so.

In the opening illustrations for *11 Words for Love*, a family flees their homeland to find sanctuary in a new country, carrying with them a suitcase full of love, in the form of family photograph albums. As the family grows and finds their footing, their love expands, and new photographs are added to their family albums. The illustrations in *11 Words for Love* are rendered in watercolour pencil and collage detailing, on heavily textured coloured cardstock. White "polaroid" borders frame or edge many of the illustrations, marking them as snapshots within family albums. Symbols of love woven throughout the illustrations include the Palestinian flag, The Dome of the Rock, the spelling out of the letters LOVE in sign language, the exchange or sharing of gifts (cake, fruit, flowers) the Dabke dance, the rainbow flag, and the recurring image of the sun setting, which symbolises new beginnings, and the continuity of life and all things.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Randa Abdel-Fattah is a Palestinian Egyptian Muslim writer, academic, former lawyer and the multi-award-winning author of 11 books published in over 20 countries, including multiple translations, stage productions in the US and Australia, and a graphic novel series. Randa has been nominated for Sweden's 2019 and 2018 Astrid Lindgren Award, the world's biggest children's and young adult literature award. Randa is also a postdoctoral research fellow in the Department of Sociology at Macquarie University and her recent book is *Coming of Age in the War on Terror* (2021).

See also:

'Living the Nakba: Testimonies of trauma, loss, rage and hope' ABC Religion and Ethics Online, 10 May 2018 Randa Abdel-Fattah

<<https://www.abc.net.au/religion/living-the-nakba-testimonies-of-trauma-loss-rage-and-hope/10094746>>

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ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Maxine Beneba Clarke is a widely published Australian writer of Afro-Caribbean descent. Maxine's short fiction, non-fiction and poetry have been published in numerous publications including *Overland*, *The Age*, *Meanjin*, *The Saturday Paper* and *The Big Issue*. Her critically acclaimed short fiction collection *Foreign Soil* won the ABIA for Literary Fiction Book of the Year 2015 and the 2015 Indie Book Award for Debut Fiction, and was shortlisted for the Matt Richell Award for New Writing at the 2015 ABIAs and the 2015 Stella Prize. She was also named as one of the *Sydney Morning Herald's* Best Young Novelists for 2015. Maxine has published three poetry collections including *Carrying the World*, which won the Victorian Premier's Literary Award for Poetry 2017 and was shortlisted for the Colin Roderick Award. *The Hate Race*, a memoir about growing up black in Australia won the NSW Premier's Literary Award Multicultural NSW Award 2017 and was shortlisted for an ABIA, an Indie Award, the Victorian Premier's Literary Awards and Stella Prize. *The Patchwork Bike*, Maxine's first picture book with Van T. Rudd was a CBCA Honour Book for 2017. Her children's books include *Wide, Big World*, *Fashionista* and *When We Say Black Lives Matter*.

See also:

'Author Maxine Beneba Clarke on the lack of racial diversity in children's books | Art Works' *YouTube* September 5, 2021

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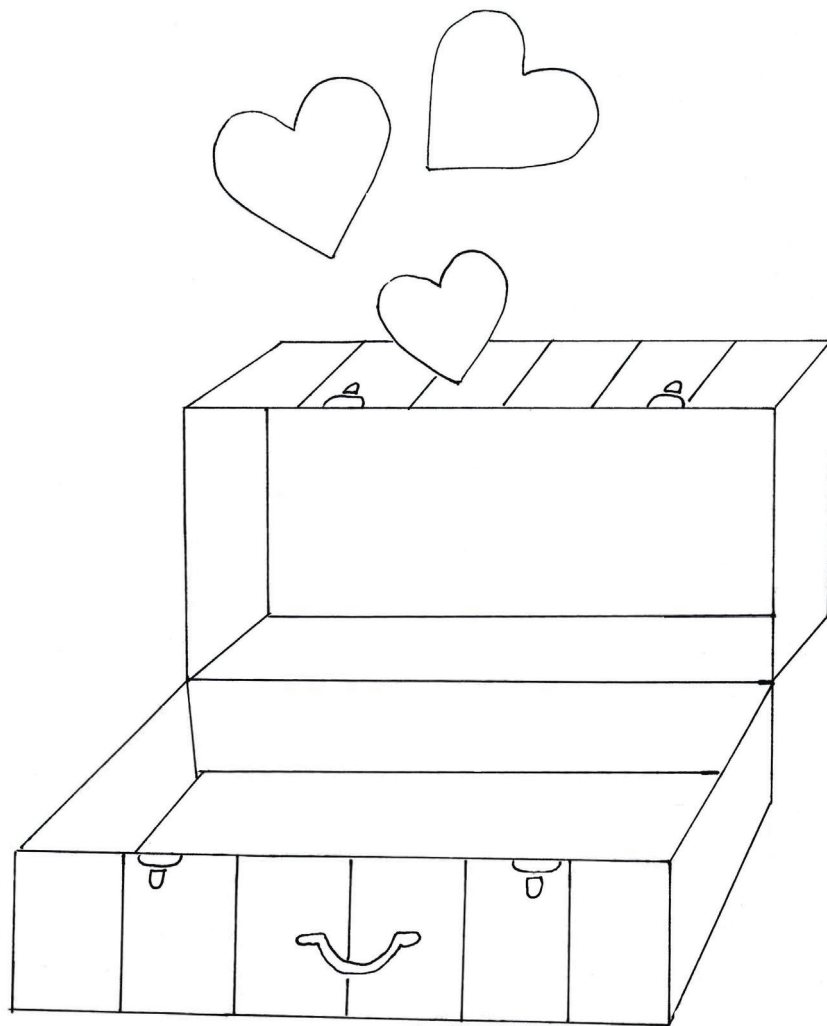
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WORKSHEETS

WORKSHEET 1. COLLAGE/COMPLETE THIS

ILLUSTRATION

Fill this outline illustration of a 'love suitcase' by the illustrator, Maxine Beneba Clarke, with pictures or a collage of what you would pack as the memories to take in your own 'love suitcase'.



WORKSHEET 2. RHYMING WORDS

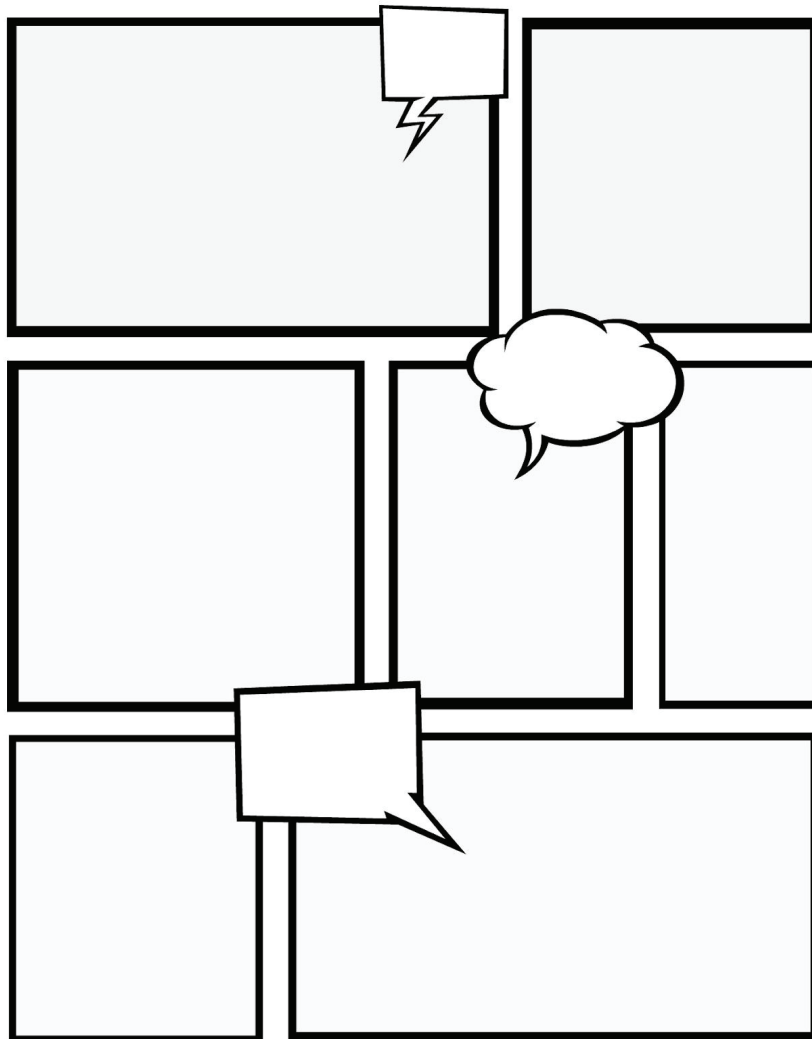
Choose more pairs of rhyming words in this text.

MEET	FEET	
KIND	ENTWINED	

Then choose a third rhyming word and create another rhyming sentence which relates to this text.

WORKSHEET 3. GRAPHIC STORYTELLING

Create a graphic novel/comic interpretation of one of the scenes in this book. Use the layout below as the storyboard for your comic. Enlarge on a photocopier to give you more space.



Comic Book Template viewed at: <http://www.pinterest.com/pin/365706432212821426/>

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR OF THE NOTES

Dr Robyn Sheahan-Bright AM operates justified text writing and publishing consultancy services, and is widely published on children's literature, publishing history and Australian fiction. In 2011 she was the recipient of the CBCA (Qld Branch) Dame Annabelle Rankin Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Queensland, in 2012 the CBCA Nan Chauncy Award for Distinguished Services to Children's Literature in Australia, and in 2014, the QWC's Johnno Award. In 2021 she was appointed a Member of the Order of Australia.